



PROJECTING SUPPORTIVE EDUCATION FOR TECHNICALLY OTIOSE

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In recent years, the attempts to liberalize and globalize the Indian economy through removal of control over physical (materials / products/equipment etc.) and financial (industrial licensing and lowering of tariff barriers) capital and the emergence of information revolution, which has reduced the time lag in the transfer of information, has created significant economic opportunities for the country in the global market as well as stiff competition in the national market. To derive maximum return from the opportunities, technology is being continuously upgraded by the firms to enhance the quality of the products and productivity of the resources. Any change in technology leads to changing skills requirement among the labour.

In traditional employment relationship, the relationship between employee and employer is well defined. In case of any technological upgradation, employer used to take care of the training needs of the employees, commensurate with technological up-gradation. However, most of the modern employment is being generated in the informal sector where the employment relationship is not well defined. The employer, in that circumstance, may not take care of training need of the employees. On the contrary, those employees are declared redundant. The relative immobility of the labour and lack of defined employer-employee relationship leaves them out of work in the process of any technological upgradation. The paper is divided into four sections. The Second section discusses the nature and magnitude of the technologically unemployed. The third section highlights the need for designing cost-effective continuing education programs for the technologically unemployed workers. It can be operated through engineering institutions, which has already required infrastructure. The last section concludes the discussion.

Nature and Magnitude of the Technologically Unemployed in India:

Liberalization and opening up of the economy made the market very competitive in India. Presence of multinational companies have enhanced the competition for the local companies also. They have compelled to introduce new products and technology to be able to sustain in the market. Presence of multinational companies may affect products in two different ways. First, they increase competition in the market place and produce changes in demand patterns. Second, they provide a source for learning (through imitation). Increased demands for output and co-existence with multinational companies have a positive effect on adaptation also. This leads to continuous upgradation in the quality of products which ultimately leads to upgradation in technology. Any change in technology changes the technical skill requirement among the technological manpower and makes older skill redundant. As a result, the labour market tends to be in flux. The shift in the required skill among of the workforce thus may rest on the following factors:

1. Changed product mix and the rapid disappearance for the traditional skill;
2. Increased investment on research and development;
3. Application of capital-deepening technical progress.

During the 1990s in the Indian industrial sector, as high as 30% redundancy was estimated in the organized sector which employed around 28 million workers. The 243 operating central public enterprises alone shed 200,000 jobs during 1991-97, other than retrenchment. In addition, as high as 15,534 workers were retrenched in organized industrial sector. The steel authority of India in the public sector reduced its workforce from 2,30,333 in 1986 to 1,80,000 in 1997. In Indian Railways, it has already been estimated there is as high as 33 per cent of the work force as redundant. The Tata Iron and Steel Co, in the private sector, planned to down size its workforce to the one-third of its present size. The formal sector makes very small component of the total manufacturing sector. Large part is made up of the informal sector. There is no estimate about labour redundancy in the informal sector. But on the basis of formal sector, rough approximation can be made about labour redundancy in the informal sector also which certainly be very large.

The social cost of the labour redundancy is very high. No country can afford to bear such a huge social cost. The workers need to be upgrading their skill for

enhancing their employability in the labour market. The employer takes care of the training need of the employees in the formal sector. But no training mechanism has been developed for the informal sector. The process of skill formation in the informal sector takes place through its own mechanism (hereditary and on-the-job) outside the formal sector of training. In the name of globalization, continuous technical training is being considered as essential for the workers to make them able to work in a worldwide business environment. To achieve this goal, it is essential for workers of informal sector along with formal sector workers to undergo training programme, other than usual in-house or on-the-job training. At the same time, training cannot be imparted through present mechanism in case of very fast technical upgradation. Under these circumstances, training mechanism must be redesigned. Imparting training with a view to improve the skill base in the informal sector is a complex one. The informal sector is very large and segmented. As the training needs are different from one set of segments to another, continuing education may be designed to be able to provide cost effective training for each segment of the informal sector.

Skill Upgradation through Continuing Education:

The changes in technology and advent of information revolution have resulted in a shift in the work organization and nature of skill demand. The workers are expected to learn and adapt these changes quickly. They are expected to use these technologies very efficiently and productively. If the workers are not able to adapt themselves quickly according to changing need, they become redundant. As the government of India initiated its economic reform programme, a substantial displacement of organized sector workers was envisaged. Indeed, the new industrial policy recognized this possibility and provides that "the government will protect the interest of labour, enhance their welfare and equip them in all respect to deal with the inevitability of technological change." In particular, it provides launching of the National Renewal Fund (NRF). It was stated that "this fund will provide a social safety net, which will protect the workers from adverse consequences of technological transformation, provide retraining to them, so that they are in a position to remain active productive partners in the process of modernization".

However, in the informal sector, liberalization has led to generation of atypical employment such as short-term contracts, marginal part-time work, new forms of self-employment, in- and out-sourcing and tele-working etc. The proposed safety net will protect the organized workers only but the organized sector makes a very small component of the total employment. Most of the employment is being created in the informal sector. These employments will not be covered by NRF. Skill of the workers engaged in this sector has also to be upgraded if they have to be re-employed. In absence of any training programme, they are being re-employed in inferior jobs in the informal sector. Therefore, the economic advantage for the country as a whole has resulted in a social disadvantage for the labour.

Informal sector is very big and heterogeneous. The technological upgradation in this sector will vary quite significantly and therefore, the technologically unemployed need to be trained in different type of technology. The training programme needs to be flexible and cost effective also. In place of developing a separate infrastructure for training purpose, the training programme should be initiated at engineering institutions through continuing education programmes. The concept of continuing education has special significance in enhancing capabilities and skill endowment of the labour force. It is a global phenomenon and India also, beside many other countries, has taken advantage of the continuing education concept particularly for the upgradation of technical manpower.

However, it needs to be redesigned again according to the changing requirement of the market. Majority of the students opined that latest computer language should be incorporated in their course curricula. Most of the students employed in construction activity found the course content as inadequate; therefore, syllabus of civil engineering must incorporate recent development in the field of construction. We can infer from the responses that the course curriculum has to be latest and according to the market requirement. We have to take note that all programmes which are being taught under continuing education are fixed and

rigid in terms of duration and course content. The students under continuing education are employed. The degree under continuing education will benefit them in getting higher post. Therefore, they can afford even long duration in continuing education programme. However, the technologically unemployed are those who have lost their job, therefore, the time spent on reskilling will have huge opportunity cost. At the same time, they may not require all the modules of the programme but only a part of the programme. Hence, there is need to introduce flexibility in terms of content and duration. Programmes with flexible duration and content should run along with existing programmes under continuing education. As the infrastructure already exists, the flexible programme will be cost effective also.

CONCLUSION:

Integration of the world economy has enhanced competition and compelled the employers to continuously upgrade the technology to increase the labour productivity as a survival strategy. Improved technology requires new skill for operation. Employers in the formal sector are supposed to retrain the employees according to the changes in technology.

However, defining employers-employee relationship is difficult in new and different pattern of atypical employment. They may not take care of the retraining need. In case of any change in technology, employer may prefer to replace the employees. Therefore, the economic advantage for the country as a whole may result in social disadvantage for the labour. In this scenario, there is urgent need for designing and implementing continuing education in such way that it can cater to the need of technologically unemployed. As the required infrastructure is already existing in the engineering colleges for programmes under conventional and continuing education of fixed duration, the programmes with flexible duration and flexible content will be cost effective.

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